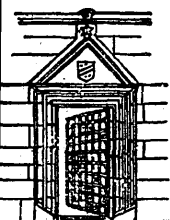


THE FR OF C



H. TOWNSE

FREEDOM OF GOD



THE KINGSGATE PRESS

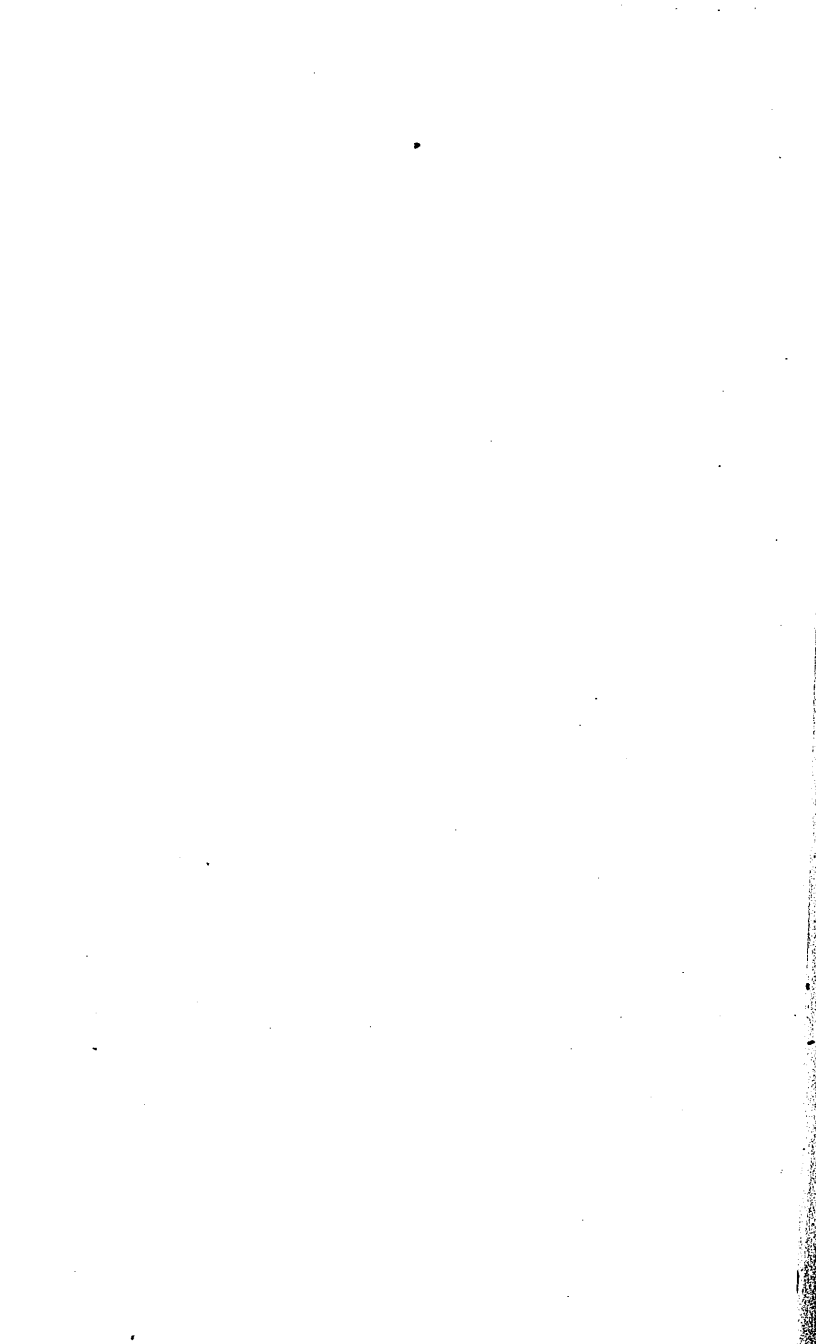
NSSEND, M.A., D.D.

The University of Chicago
Libraries





THE FREEDOM OF GOD



THE FREEDOM OF GOD

By
H. TOWNSEND, M.A., D.D.

London
THE KINGSGATE PRESS,
4, SOUTHAMPTON ROW, W.C.1.

BT/01
T74

MANCHESTER
TO
REHABILITATION

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE MANCHESTER
BAPTIST LAYMEN'S MOVEMENT.

Disc.

FOREWORD.

THE title of the book is taken from chapter six, which was a lecture delivered to a Manchester audience under the auspices of the Manchester Baptist Laymen's Movement. This is the explanation of several references to Baptists in that chapter and the following chapter, which are equally applicable to our brethren of the Congregational Church and other Free Churches. The book is sent forth in the hope that it may help young men and women to do some clear thinking on the doctrine of God, and also relate their ideas of God to the purity of the Church and the impact of such spiritual purity on the world to-day.

Easter, 1928.

BAPTIST COLLEGE,
MANCHESTER.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT IS BELIEF? - - - -	PAGE 9
-------------------------	-----------

CHAPTER II.

LIFE AND THE IDEA OF GOD - - - -	22
----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER III.

THE RETURN TO THE BIBLE - - - -	30
---------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

NATIONAL RELIGION AND THE IDEA OF GOD -	41
---	----

CHAPTER V.

THE IDEA OF GOD AND WORLD-PEACE - -	56
-------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI.

THE FREEDOM OF GOD - - - -	60
----------------------------	----

CHAPTER VII.

THE FREEDOM OF MAN - - - -	76
----------------------------	----



THE FREEDOM OF GOD

CHAPTER I.

WHAT IS BELIEF?

A SHORT time ago there was a discussion in the columns of the *Nation and Athenæum* which led to an enquiry concerning the things most surely believed by its readers. Fourteen questions were drawn up, and readers were asked to say "yes" or "no" to each question. Afterwards, the *Daily News* printed the same questions and asked for answers from its readers. All the questions were concerning belief. Two questions and the answers given will furnish an adequate reason for a brief enquiry concerning the meaning of the word "believe." One of the questions was, "Do you believe that Jesus Christ was divine in a sense in which all living men could not be said to be divine?" Is Jesus the pre-existent and eternal Son of God as the New Testament claims Him to be? Over four thousand readers replied "no" to this question. The next question was, "Do you believe in any form of Christianity?" Considerably over ten thousand readers answered "yes." From an analysis of the answers returned there were readers who believed in some form of Christianity

who did not believe in Jesus Christ in the New Testament sense of the word.

There is no necessity to attempt to reconcile the two answers mentioned, but these replies and others which were given reveal a deplorable vagueness in present-day thinking on spiritual truths. They indicate an uninformed impatience with the varieties of Christian belief. It would have been helpful if the two journals named above had attempted to instruct their readers on the nature of belief and pointed out what a man ought to mean when he says "I believe."

There are two aspects of belief to consider. There is the self that believes and there is the object believed in. It will be necessary to keep this distinction in mind if any exact thinking is to be done. A believing man acts in certain definite ways which can only be explained by the object in which he believes. When a man puts his money into the Bank of England because he believes the Bank is safe, his belief has everything to do with the way in which he invests his money. If another says that he believes in God and is thereby convinced that he ought to be a democrat, the two aspects of belief are obvious, and in this instance belief affects a man's politics. This distinction between the believer and the object believed in, between the human and the divine sides of the experience of believing, will have the most momentous consequences in our discussion. In every-day experience life is deeply affected by the objects in which men believe. In religious experience it will

be seen that everything turns on the kind of God in whom a man believes.

I.

It will be well to indicate at once what is involved when a man says that he believes in God. It means that he has made a decision and committed himself to God. Such a belief involves the activity of the whole man, thought, emotion and will, but especially the power of will. Belief ought to lead to a wider and deeper knowledge of God, which is another way of saying that we ought to think as clearly as possible about God if we believe in Him. The beginnings of religious experience, however, do not depend upon, nor do they demand, clear ideas of God: at the same time, in religious experience, there is always what we will call an *attitude* to God. This is true of the religious life of children. God is real to the child although the child's ideas of God may be crude and vague. The attitude of the child to God may be reverent and his experience vivid, but the intellectual capacity of the child will limit the range of his knowledge of God. Even in later years religious experience does not always bring intellectual awakening. It ought to do so, and the most startling spiritual results would follow if it did so. But the fact remains that many Christian people never mentally grow up. Their religious experience becomes formal, or they seem to have a "stop" in the mind. They would claim vehemently that they believe in God, but they have obviously

ceased to think about Him. They simply accept what they are told by others, and ask no questions.

It cannot be stressed too often that belief in Christ demands decision, and that Christian experience begins in a definite committal of the self to Christ.

While all preaching should appeal to the intellect and stimulate downright thinking, it will fail unless it appeals to the conscience and leads to decision for Christ and His way of life. It is far from easy for the preacher to-day to find points of contact with the masses of people outside the churches, and it is certain that much modern preaching is over the heads of such people. An awakening intellect under true pastoral guidance will soon follow the decision for Christ. This cannot be long delayed if the Church is the school where men grow in the knowledge of Christ and His grace.

On one occasion Jesus gave thanks to His Father because He had revealed unto babes the spiritual truth which was hidden from the intellectuals of His day. The Master had found His contact with men who had believed in Him and followed Him, and out of their deepening experience had come to know the secrets of heaven and earth. The words of the Fourth Gospel, which arrest every reverent mind, are Light, Truth, Love and Eternal Life; and they are only understood by men who have believed and committed themselves to Christ. It is recorded in this Gospel that Jesus answered the

Jews who were enquiring into His own credentials and were amazed at His knowledge of God: "If any willeth to do His will, he shall know . . ."

II.

We now turn to the other side of belief, or the object believed in. When I believe in an object, for the time being the object interests me, guides my movements, and limits the range of my action. The object believed in decides the kind of activity I adopt; in a word, the object which I believe controls me. Religious experience can never be explained apart from the object which inspires it and influences it. The object may be a tree, a star, an animal, or a demon, and as long as a man believes that any of these objects has some mysterious power over his destiny, the object will affect his attitude and control his forms of worship. If the central emotion in his religious experience is fear, that is because there is something in the nature of the object which begets fear in him. If trust and love are central in the attitude of the worshipper, that is because the object worshipped is drawing out of the believer his tender emotion. In Christian experience I commit myself to Christ and He controls me. This is the meaning of the New Testament writers when they urge men to believe in Christ. Paul writes that he is the slave of Christ, he is ruled over, his activity is directed, and at the same time limited, by Christ who is Lord and Master.

It is at this point that we touch the heart and the problem of all religious experience, whether it be that of primitive man or civilised man, whether it be the religious experience of the Old Testament or of the New Testament. What is often felt by many readers to be a serious problem of the Old Testament can only be solved in the light of what we have said concerning the belief of man and the control of God. We shall enquire how far men in the Old Testament committed themselves to God. Do they commit themselves according to the knowledge they have? Do they turn away from the light which God has given them, and make a compromise with God for the sake of some personal advantage? How far are they willing that God should control them? This discussion of the human side and the divine side of religious experience has often been obscured by prejudice and ignorance. If any one, however, will study the Bible to learn how far men have believed in God, how far they have committed themselves to God, and how far they have been willing to be ruled over by God, he will learn the truth concerning the revelation of God to man.

Again, the quality of the Christian life turns on the control of Christ over the believer. The triumphs and the failures of the believer are explained according to the measure of Christ's rule over him. The inconsistencies of Christians, due to the uncontrolled speech and action of those who bear His name, are a sore perplexity to young people. Such lapses and shortcomings often prejudice the

claim of Christ. The young reject the Master's call and ignore His mercy, because they do not distinguish between the human side and the divine side of Christian experience. They are so blinded and biassed by human failure that they ignore the high claims of Christ. It is obviously unfair to refuse to have anything to do with Christ, because some one who says he believes in Christ, has been disloyal to His Ideal.

Further, we touch the heart of the problem of the Christian Church, when we discuss how far the Church believes in Christ and how far the Church is controlled by Christ. In the many Christian communities of the world there is the human side and the divine side of their experience. Mr. H. G. Wells says that people are asking to-day with a new intensity, "What must I do to be saved?" and he adds that people are repelled when, in answer to such a passionate enquiry, some Christian exponent dressed up like an Egyptian priest three thousand years ago, performs mysterious chants and magical ceremonies. He claims that within a few score years of the crucifixion Christianity had become hopelessly involved in pagan ceremonies and superstitions, and that the Church needs to shed these priestly and theological encumbrances if she is going to serve her Founder. Dr. Jacks has said recently that Christianity has become a smothered religion, overlaid by systems of philosophy and creeds, and involved in political entanglements. It is imperative that the New Testament type of Christianity should be presented to the modern

world. It makes all the difference what kind of Christianity is preached and practised in the land. The formality of worship, temple-treading, as Isaiah called it, worship which produces no fruits of the Spirit in the life of the Christian community: the Church which insists on the repetition of the creeds beginning "I believe," and tolerates laxity in morals: the Church which is always fighting to save her own life, and identifies her life with her vested material interests: the Church which has no sympathy with the masses and no interest in social, political, or industrial reform: the Church which aims at all the pomp and power of an earthly State, which has comfortable and rich officials who love titles and power such as the common people cannot reconcile with what they know of Christ: the Church which is the servant of the State and offers no rebuke to statesmen who are heading for war, and supports war as though patriotism were Christianity: the Church which never rebukes Society for its luxuries and its sins and its Ascot race parades, and admits such members of Society to its Communion Table: the problems raised for multitudes of thoughtful people by these glaring inconsistencies in the professing Christian communities, can only be solved when it is plainly said that such Churchianity is not controlled by Christ. The true Church is of those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and whose communal life is controlled by Christ.

III.

It still remains to show how belief has worked in religious experience, and how it has only persisted when it has brought definite results to the believer. It may be said that a man is always testing the object in which he believes. If the object rewards the believer he persists in believing: if the object disappoints the believer he has no further use for it. When some member of a tribe secretly sets up a fetish and prays that he may return without wounds from the battle, or that he may seize another man's wealth, he is putting the fetish to a definite test. If the fetish disappoints him and continues to disappoint him, he throws it away and tries another object. A god who cannot justify his existence is soon cast off. This is the explanation of the way in which primitive worshippers so easily transfer their allegiance from one god to another. The evolution of religion is very largely the story of the way in which men have discarded gods who could not deliver the goods. The road of religious progress is strewn with broken idols. Men are never more angry than when they find their gods out, and they never smash anything with more vehemence than the god who has let them down.

Now it is not suggested that Christian belief is simply a man's experiment with Christ. The word "experiment" is somewhat unsuitable, for there is no uncertainty concerning Christ. It is much better to use the word "venture." In Christian belief there is always an element of venture. We may

say that Christ is always calling the believer to a life of adventure. The Old Testament has numerous illustrations of men who ventured beyond the certainties of this life, and who went further because they found that God stood every test to which they put Him. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is the story of men and women who went into the unknown with both feet: they walked with God: they were believing people who found themselves able to subdue kingdoms, stop the mouths of lions, and overcome their weariness. Believing men go all out for Christ. They are lured to make venture upon venture, and they always find that Christ stands every test.

Pascal put the matter in a somewhat novel way. He reasoned that a man had everything to gain and nothing to lose by believing in God. If God exists and a man believes in Him, let him weigh what his gains will be. If God does not exist, and a man believes in Him, Pascal says that he is no worse for believing. He argued that religion was a kind of bet that God existed. If God exists the man wins his bet; if God does not exist the man loses nothing. It was a strange argument to induce men to believe in God. It may be thought that the language of the gaming table is utterly out of place in a discussion on Christian belief. Pascal was not, however, appealing primarily to the intellect, he was recognising that he must make a practical appeal to the men of his day. If he could not convince men by logic he would invite them to put Jesus Christ to the test and learn whether He stood the test.

Pascal was saying in his own way that Christianity was the greatest venture which a man ever made.

This appeal to believe in Christ is not less reasonable because it is practical. Life is not ruled by logic. It is necessary to remember that life touches depths which the intellect cannot fathom. No one would disparage the appeal to the intellect, but the urgency of convincing the intellect is not in question. What is in question is how to find some point of contact with the multitudes who know not Christ. The Church is not likely to find such contact with modern life by her insistence on priestly claims; nor does the recital of her creeds quicken the blood or lure men to great ventures. Men are yearning for something by which they can get through life at least decently. In the battle which they fight they ask, "Is there any help from heaven above or on earth below by which we may win through?" The answer to such restlessness is to urge men to put Christ to the test, and prove whether He can satisfy the hunger of the soul. Out in the confusion of the Western front, when hearts were shaking and men found creeds and Churchianity useless: when they felt they had no solid religious ground beneath their feet, and nothing to grip; out in all that thunder and fury Donald Hankey said, "Religion is betting your life that there is a God." He was attempting to say something which would steady men in the hour of tragedy; he was not arguing with desperate men; he was calling them to decision. Let them believe in God and commit themselves to Him. They could

fling themselves elsewhere and they would fling themselves away; but let them take the greatest venture of life and they would learn that God bore the test; that even in the hour of battle and death God would save them from confusion.

It is plainly to be seen that newspaper proprietors are growing alarmed at the religious condition of England. They have also been realising that human nature has its spiritual hunger. Whether newspapers which print advertisements of drink, back the brewers and encourage the horse racing crowd, can achieve much good by printing articles on Christianity, is open to discussion. One series of newspaper articles has been published, and it reveals what novelists and journalists and dramatists think of Christianity and the Church. There is an astonishing amount of rubbish in what they write, but there is an article by one who writes as the *Unknown Man*, which is worthy of attention at this stage of our discussion. This man had found it difficult to make a straight course: under blue skies and on the shining road he had not been able to drive despair out of his heart, and he says, "I decided to bet my life that there is a God, and more and more as the years go by I find that in so far as I yield up my will to God, and open my heart to His indwelling, in so far as I try to live out my everyday life in the Christian spirit, the experiment works. Peace and serenity come to my soul. . . . That figure hanging dying on the Tree, with arms outstretched to all the world, is the eternal symbol of the wondrous fact that there is a cross in the

heart of God, and that the Way of the Cross is the Way of Life, because it is the Way of Love."

This cumulative evidence is true to the New Testament. Pascal was a philosopher, Donald Hankey was a soldier, the Unknown Man is a journalist; not one of them a priest or a preacher, but they all argue that Christianity is the greatest venture which a man ever makes, and when he makes it Christ never lets him down.

Every soul yearns for better things; knows what shame is, what sorrow is; what the tyranny of evil habit is. Every man who sits down and thinks is sometimes baffled by life. What does it mean? What is its value? What is its goal? The best answer to these questions and yearnings will come to him who believes in Christ, or puts Christ to the test. Let a man read about Christ in the New Testament, and learn what results such knowledge will yield: let him think about Christ, and he will discover how the Saviour liberates his intellectual capacity and leads him forward to new interests: let him pray to Christ, and find that Christ makes life more splendid: and the best test of all is to love Christ and see how life unfolds in beauty and dignity and tenderness, through the glow of the Redeemer's love.

Finding, following, seeking, struggling
Is He sure to bless?
Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs,
Answer, YES!

CHAPTER II.

LIFE AND THE IDEA OF GOD.

A MAN'S life "pivots" on his belief in God. His attitude to the Church, to the world, to politics, money and sport, to the housing question, the betting question, the drink problem, the sex question; his attitude to the poor, the unemployed and little children; his attitude to war and international questions, will have vital relation to his belief in God. When a man has no deep convictions about God it is fairly easy to estimate his worth to his generation. In the long run he will not be worth much. No man attempts much or achieves abiding good for his age unless there is a burning conviction in his soul that God must be reckoned with. We will reason the matter out.

Mr. Bertrand Russell is a philosopher who has the virtue of writing in an arresting way. He received considerable sympathy some years ago because he was thrust out of his College lectureship in Philosophy. We will discuss Mr. Russell, however, as a man who has smashed his gods and thrown down his altars. Having dispensed with God, what does he think of the origin of man, or what values does he attach to human life and destiny? He sees the masses of people involved in struggles and tears, and he watches their achievements, but he says, "It is merely a flash in the

pan." He explains the origin of man by saying that he "is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving." He regards man as the chance product of material forces. They produced him blindly, not knowing what they were producing. His origin, his hopes, his fears, his loves, are all the outcome of the accidental jostling of atoms. Because Mr. Russell has no god, he has a correspondingly depressing and crude theory of the origin and value of human life.

Further, when Mr. Russell writes of the condition of the world, he has no social hope worthy of the name. He deliberately scorns the Christian ideal of a new social order based on the principle of love. He satirises bitterly the Christian motive, and shows his inadequate equipment for writing on Christianity when he says, "Historically it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if He did we do not know anything about him." His refusal to believe in God has led him so far astray that he doubts what historically is beyond question.

In regard to the further progress of the race he says "No movement ever acquires a strong hold over large masses of people except through hatred." Roman Catholicism became strong through the hatred of pagans and heretics. Socialism became strong through the hatred of capitalists. Nationalism became strong through the hatred of foreigners. The only bond which can hold together large masses of men is a common hatred. Such a judgment could only come from one who is blind to the purpose which runs through history. This

pessimistic outlook for the future could only come from one who has no God. Mr. Russell knows no ministry of reconciliation which is capable of removing the hatred and suspicions of men. If hatred is the soul of Romanism then it is surely doomed, but there is something in Romanism too spiritual to be explained by such a term. If hatred is the soul of socialism then it will reap what it has sown.

Again, because Mr. Russell has no idea of God and refuses to believe in Him, he has no hope of the future of the human soul. "No fire, no heroism, nothing can preserve a man beyond the grave." He has no God, and therefore no hope of immortality. Mr. Russell does not know the love of Christ which like a tide has been flowing through the centuries, making human life decent and clean and generous. There are many precious things in the world which have been won by the agony and endurance of men, and they are the best gifts of God to His children. According to the philosophy of Mr. Russell, all such goodness, beauty and truth are destined to extinction. Refusing to believe in God he can say no more than that man in this world is like an animal trapped in a cage—the victim of unyielding despair.

GOD THE INVISIBLE FIRE.

Mr. H. G. Wells has a nobler idea of God than Mr. Russell. For several years he has been affirming that he has discovered God. In passing we may

say that it would be possible to divide men into two classes : those who affirm that they have discovered God, and those who also know that God has discovered them. As an illustration of the second class John says " we love Him because He first loved us." There are some who seek God or discover Him in the sense that Mr. Wells has done, and they stress the human side of their quest. There are others who know that God has sought them and discovered them; these stress the fact of God's initiative and grace. In his search Mr. Wells says that he has been led to reject the view that God is absolutely omnipotent. He writes as though he did not believe that God has an existence apart from existing in nature and in men; that God dwells within him but not above him. At any rate, he sees the difficulty of thinking about God as unlimited and absolute power. Mr. Britling says, " If I thought there was an omnipotent God who looked down on battles and deaths and all the waste and horrors of this war, able to prevent these things and doing them to amuse Himself, I would spit in His empty face." In answer to this we affirm that the will of God is real, but real also are the wills of men. God could have made men as obedient as the stars in their courses, but then they would not have been men. To have consciousness and intelligence as we have them, demands that we should be the beings we are. God is responsible for the will of man. He has given man the terrible power of refusing Him and fighting against Him. Christian people have too often overlooked this responsibility of the

human will in their desire to magnify the Sovereignty of God. They have sought to glorify God as omnipotent and they have done it at the expense of the will of man. God is patient and is not going to be defeated ultimately in His own universe, but it is impossible to interpret history in the light of divine purpose unless we see the terrific nature of the conflict between the will of God and the wills of men.

Now Mr. Wells says that he is conscious of a God who fights and burns and struggles within him. The God he knows is identified with all that is best in Mr. Wells's heart. "If there was nothing else in all the world but our kindness to each other, or the love which makes you weep in this kind October sunshine; if there was nothing else at all, if everything else was cruelty and filthiness and bitterness, it would still be certain that there was a God of love and righteousness." Mr. Wells has laid hold of a great truth when he tells us that he believes in a fighting God. The Bible has also much to say about the fighting God. We shall deal with the Biblical treatment later as far as space and our purpose permit. Mr. Wells's philosophy of the God who wrestles within him can be expressed in the following words :

And every virtue we possess
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone.

Every aspiration, the urge within his life toward a nobler achievement has God as its source. Mr.

Wells, however, does not see what the Bible teaches—that the struggles of God are real and have a quality all their own. This is obvious in the experience, and most of all in the cross, of Christ. Christian belief has always affirmed that the struggles of Christ were unique and real for Himself and God, and that by His struggles we are healed.

When we ask how Mr. Wells's belief in God affects his views of man and the future, we see how far short he falls of the New Testament ideal. He is not very hopeful of the human race. In some of his books he thinks British civilisation is a jerry-built affair and the only thing to do with it is to smash it and begin again. He is not very hopeful of changing human nature. Since Mr. Wells's convictions about the God within him have taken root in his life his outlook has changed. He says in his lecture on *Democracy under Revision* that we are entering on a new phase of life—he calls it the phase of democratic synthesis, “a great religious-spirited phase. If you choose to link it to Christianity or Islam or Buddhism or any existing democratic religion; or with Communism, that religious substitute; or call it in itself the religion of progress, nothing that I am saying here to-night will stand in your way.” If Mr. Wells moves on to know the God who is above him, as well as the God who is within him, he will differentiate more accurately between Christianity and other religions as capable of supplying the spiritual dynamic, which alone can bring about the democratic synthesis

which we would welcome. Again, we are unable to divorce Mr. Wells's belief in God from his political ideals, or his views of the dynamic forces which make and break nations, or his values of the individual and his destiny. The idea of God lies at the back of a man's thought and effort. It always did and it always does.

THE JEWISH, OR THE JESUS, IDEA OF GOD.

If we were to ask many Christian people to write down their idea of God it is certain that numbers would be found to have Jewish and Old Testament views rather than the view of God revealed by Jesus. It is obvious that many Christian people hold the Jewish idea of God. They do not see that such views are often nationalist and not universal. The persistence of the Jewish idea of God in modern Christianity is having the most disastrous effect on young people. It does not seem to dawn on some readers of the New Testament that it was on account of a certain idea of God that the Jews thwarted Jesus, called Him a blasphemer, and even attributed His goodness to an evil source. The Jewish leaders had a definite idea of God which was held so tenaciously that they thought they were justified in getting Jesus out of the way by crucifixion. They were unscrupulous in doing it. They forged evidence. They pulled wires. They used the name of Caesar whom they hated. What kind of God must the Jews have believed in? It may be said that they were blind and ignorant and

mad. The truth is that the Jewish leaders did not believe in the God who was revealed in the life and teaching of Jesus. The clash between the Jews and Jesus was hottest and most furious over this issue. The God of the Jewish leaders was nationalist, exclusive, upholding the eternal validity of the law of the Old Testament. They saw clearly that if Jesus was right then nearly everything that Judaism stood for was mistaken or wrong. For Jesus taught that God was Universal Love, the Father who had sent Him to seek and save the lost, even at the cost of Calvary. The Jews did not believe in a God who cared for publicans or sinners and the bottom dogs of Jewish society. They abused Jesus as the friend of such outcasts. When we compare the values of human life held by the Jews and taught by Jesus, we see that they are rooted in different ideas of God. It does matter vitally what men believe about God, and since the revelation of God brought by Jesus is unique and final, it is necessary that all followers of Jesus should understand and proclaim the truth as He taught it.

CHAPTER III.

THE RETURN TO THE BIBLE.

WE have seen how necessary it is that men should understand the truth about God. We shall now urge the study of Biblical sources as the surest guide to what we ought to believe. If Jesus taught the final truth about God, then we must recognise that the Old Testament revelation of God was incomplete. This means that God was never fully understood even by the prophets of the Old Testament as He was understood by Jesus. Most of the trouble over what is called the problem of the Old Testament centres round this question. If we compare the idea of God held by Abraham, Elijah, Isaiah, and Jonah, we are conscious of a growing and deepening experience of which God is the source. It ought not to be difficult to understand that God was revealing Himself according to the capacity of Israel to receive His truth. Jesus said on one occasion that He had many things to say to the disciples, but they were not yet able to receive them. An awakening intelligence and a tender conscience are necessary to receive the light which breaks upon men from God.

It is a critical moment when a man begins to think seriously about God. If God is able to bear the searching analysis of the intellect, then the believer is confirmed in his conviction. Should any

doubt arise concerning the character of God there are soon signs of the disintegration of the religious life. A deeper understanding of the nature of God has often led men to change their forms of worship and has revolutionised their personal habits and social customs. There are many instances in history where advancing religious thought has destroyed the old deities. Once men out-think their gods they despise them and throw them away. Sophocles and Euripides ridiculed the prevailing ideas of the Greek gods whose immoral intrigues were lower than the ideals of the poets themselves. We express this by saying that these Greek thinkers had outgrown the gods of their age.

When we turn to the Old Testament we find the reverse of this process. No religious leader or poet in the Old Testament ever becomes cynical or critical of the character of God. On the other hand, they discover deeper and truer qualities in His nature. God is always above them or ahead of them. They never overtake Him and they never out-think Him. The character of God in the Old Testament is spiritually and ethically inexhaustible. As the prophets drink deeply from the well of God's grace and righteousness they urge the people to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly. In Greece men became more civilised than the gods. In Israel civilisation is always lagging behind the righteous character of Jahweh.

The prophets who have eager spiritual insight are ever seeking to adjust the civilisation of their age to the standard of truth and right required by

God. The quality of religious experience in the Old Testament is therefore broadening and deepening as God is better known.

To many readers of the Old Testament the character of God may not appear as lofty as the above sentences suggest. As a matter of fact it is the character of God in the Old Testament which has often proved the stumbling-block to Christian belief. It is certain that many young people have drifted from the Christian Church because they were unable to reconcile the God of the Old Testament with their ideas of mercy and generosity, ideas often learned from Christian sources. There are few young people in our congregations who have time or inclination to wrestle with the subject. It is all the more urgent, therefore, that ministers and teachers should work to understand the truth about God in the Bible. If we are going to retain young people in the Church and educate them to think aright on the modern implications of the Gospel, then we must reason out for them the difficulties of the Old Testament religion, explaining how the life of Israel must be judged in the light of the idea of God.

It is time for the Church of our day to return to the Bible, and put forth new intellectual effort to convince our age of the authority of the Bible as the utterance of God to the soul. The ecclesiastics are saying that the Church is the authority, and they claim that they are the Church. We have been answering that Christ is the authority, and so He is; but we have not been handling our sources for

that claim as wisely and vigorously as we ought. Apart from the Bible, what should we know of Christ? His life and death and resurrection are recorded in the Scriptures. Without the Scriptures what should we know of the love of God in Christ. We have been saying that our Christianity is Christo-centric; but why do we come to put Christ at the centre? Surely because the New Testament puts Him in the centre. The urgent task, therefore, is to convince this generation that God has spoken finally in Christ and that the final word is written down in the New Testament.

THE BIBLE AS THE INSTRUMENT OF REFORM.

“Brother Martin,” said John Nathin to Luther, “let the Bible alone. Read the old teachers—reading the Bible simply breeds unrest.” It always did, and it will do so again. It is the only unrest on which we can safely base *a new reformation*, or it is the only enlightenment which is creative of a better world. When men have come to know God through the revelation of His word they have always been heretics, pioneers, reformers, and often martyrs for their faith. The Bible has been the most potent and effective instrument of reform in the hands of consecrated men. When the Church has been as dead as Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones it is impossible to point to any uprising of new life which has not come from a return to the Word of God. Paganism and idolatry and moral slackness have always come upon the Church when she has

neglected the New Testament. The spiritual decadence of our own times is due to such neglect, and we shall never stop the rot until we have got people back to the Bible. At the present time they hear no authoritative note, and they are not convinced that God has spoken anywhere.

Isaiah went home one day with a broken heart, sobbing, Oh Lord, how long can these spiritual conditions endure? Then he changed his methods. He gathered a handful of men and taught them the law and the testimony. It was the first study circle in history; and in the end Isaiah and his disciples led the age out of darkness into a great light. The reformation of Isaiah was based on a return to the Word of God.¹

It was in the seventh century B.C. that Josiah inherited his grandfather's legacy of crime and tyranny and lust. And in the eighteenth year of Josiah they were repairing the temple and they found the Book of the Law. It had actually been lost. The scroll of the Law had slipped out of use in the temple service. If you would learn the revolting details of life in Jerusalem at this time read 2 Kings chapters 21-23. There you will read of the reformation of Josiah through the return of the nation to the Word of God.

In the fifth century B.C. the situation in Jerusalem was as desperate as ever, and Ezra led one of the most drastic reformations in history. How the people had wandered from God; how they repented;

¹ The reference is to Isaiah viii, 16f. See *Prophets of Israel*, W. R. Smith, p. 275.

how they stood for days in the pouring rain listening to the reading of God's Word; how they made a solemn covenant to keep that Word and how revealed religion was saved; you may read all these things in the book of Ezra. The ignorance and the paganism of the people drove Ezra to tears; he sat down astonished and plucked out his hair and his beard; he said there was only one way of saving Judaism and that was by bringing it back to the knowledge of the Word of God.

In the sixteenth century A.D., when the Church was little more than a commercial institution, Christianity was reborn by a return to the Word of God. There was open and shameless traffic in such spiritual realities as forgiveness and the future life. Only people who are ignorant of the Word of God would expect to buy forgiveness or shorten the period of future suffering by offering gold. Hence the Reformers struck at these practices by preaching the Word of God. Yet this is the Reformation which is openly denounced by the Anglo-Catholics. They prefer Rome, with her indulgences, and Europe with her people ignorant of the Word of God. They declare the Reformation to have been a blunder, and their aim is to blot it out.

When it is said that the Reformers returned to the Bible, it will be well to understand exactly what occurred. When the Reformers quoted Scripture, the Romanists tried to refute them by quoting back. They selected texts from here or there, irrespective of the context, and you can still prove

nearly anything you like by a method such as that. It was soon found, however, that the Reformers knew their Bible much the more intimately; they knew its spirit; they had breathed its atmosphere; they had understood its whole outlook; they did not regard it as an artificial compilation, but as a record of the human experience of God reaching over centuries. To them it was like a stream of living water running through the deserts of ancient civilisation, sometimes trickling, sometimes nearly dried up, sometimes surging as a torrent until it became an ocean of divine grace at the appearing of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is the record of this stream of grace flowing from the eternal hills. Men were ignorant and blind, and they did not always understand it. They blocked the stream; they made it muddy. But God was at work on Israel, and in Israel, and the Bible is the record of God's success, and also of the failures of God through the sins of men. We must see the Bible then from two points of view. We may read the Bible from the Divine point of view, and then we read of the struggle of God with men's ignorance and shame and sin; we read of God's fight for His own people, and of His suffering love: "I have trodden the wine press alone," He said. We also read of God's final conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil; how Jesus came, how He went about doing good; how compassionate He was, and how He shed His blood for the remission of sins.

Then we read the Bible from the human point of view, and we read of men who misunderstood

God's love and God's will. They were slow to learn. They clung to their old habits. They attributed impossible things to God. They misrepresented Him and they failed Him. They associated Him with immorality, human sacrifice, the humiliation of woman, and the slaughter of nations. And all the time God was wrestling with this ignorance and darkness and cruelty and devilry, and the fight of God for the human soul reached the climax at Calvary when God, as Suffering Love, made His last and winning appeal to the children of men.

It may be said that the Bible is not the same book to-day as it was for the Reformers. Between their conception and our own there is the difference between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. It may be added that criticism has been at work and shaken the foundations of the Reformation doctrine of Scripture until the Bible has no longer any authority for the modern mind. It is sometimes said, and often assumed, that the Bible can never hold again the place which it used to hold. There is to-day a vagueness and uncertainty regarding the Bible. This generation misses the appeal to believe in the Bible as the Word of God, and not long ago this appeal was central in the preaching of the Free Churches. It is obvious that we cannot continue to neglect this matter of the Bible as we have been doing. This neglect more than any other single fact explains the condition of the Free Churches to-day. The explanation of our arrested progress lies here. Our Churches have been built on the

authority of the Word of God, and now that authority is largely ignored. When we speak, men doubt our credentials. They have an impression that we are not quite sure of ourselves. They miss the ring of certainty. We argue too much and we compromise too much, whereas men expect us to know. We are vague. We raise problems and never settle them, and we sometimes speak as though there was no clear light for the soul of man. People have heard and they have read in newspapers and magazines that the Bible is no longer the authoritative Word of God for the soul, and they have well-nigh ceased to read it; the Bible no longer holds a serious place in modern life. The neglect of the Bible amongst Church members is well known to every minister. Ignorance of the Bible amongst young people is distressing. We do not think we are mistaken in saying that the Bible is read less widely in England to-day than at any time since it was printed in the English language. Many of our Sunday School teachers have not the knowledge of the Bible to enable them to teach it, and many more devoted teachers are finding it far from easy to teach young people about the Bible. Priestism is thriving on this ignorance, as it always has done. Such ignorance is sapping the foundations of the evangelical Churches, for our Churches can only live and grow by spreading the knowledge of the Word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

It is often said that criticism is responsible for this uncertainty about the message of the Bible and

for the ignorance to which we have referred. The critics are said to be the evil doers who have destroyed the confidence of people in the Word of God. If this were true, it would not lessen our task of answering the critics, and in order to answer them we should need to work as hard as they do and probably harder. We should need to examine their arguments with care and understand the nature and extent of their work; and I have no hesitation in saying that many who have denounced the critics are unable to answer them adequately because they have never worked hard enough at the Bible for themselves. The Bible has nothing to fear from criticism, whereas we are seeing that there is much to fear in modern life, because our interpretation of the Bible is not winning the intellectual respect of men.

We cannot maintain the old literal approach to the Bible. Any attempt to do so will alienate thinking people and will fail to hold the young. Many of our problems with the younger generation are due to teaching the Bible in the old way. For one thing, such teaching is contradicted by what they learn at school and in later life. How often have we heard people say that they cannot reconcile what they were taught in Sunday School or from the pulpit with what they have learned in later years. Young people study some branch of science, or at school they are taught to use the historical method of study, and they say it contradicts what they have learned about the Bible. We must remember that what is true in Science cannot be

false in Christianity. Truth is truth wherever we find it. Let us put ourselves in the place of young people, and see things as far as we can from their point of view, and let us recognise that there are many things in the Bible which need careful explanation, and which are a stumbling-block to young people who have been reared in the atmosphere of this age and who cannot associate with the character of God what to them seems cruel and arbitrary. The consciousness of God which they have is not compatible with any appearance of vengeance or favour.

The right way to read and teach the Bible is to follow the historical method. We must arrange the literature of the Bible in historical order as far as we can. No one who understands this procedure can possibly object to it. The literature of the Bible in the English translation is not in historical sequence. Only when it is arranged according to the periods of Israel's history can we trace the progress of the revelation of God to man.

CHAPTER IV.

NATIONAL RELIGION AND THE IDEA OF GOD.

WE have said that it is possible to read the Bible from two points of view. First, it is possible to trace the divine purpose in the history of Israel; to follow the golden thread running through the bondage and deliverance and pilgrimage of God's people. Then it is possible to read the Bible from the human side; to trace the perversity and stupidity of the human will, to learn how prejudice and ignorance delay the breaking of new truth upon the mind of man. We will now indicate the slow and painful conflict through which spiritual progress was made in the Old Testament. The knowledge of God did not come to Israel as easily as we often imagine. It came through the clash of empires and the conflict of cultures; it often came by the method of the earthquake and the fire, as well as by the still, small voice. Through prophets and poets God was seeking to teach His people that they could not live without Him: "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; *that he might make thee know* that man doth not live by bread only, but by everything that proceedeth out of the mouth of

the Lord doth man live." This wrestle of God with the soul of man is the most fascinating story in the world. To indicate the nature of the struggle of God with Israel we select that section of Biblical history which has been most perplexing to men who have not had the opportunity for prolonged study.

I. GOD AND THE PATRIARCHS.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob moved from place to place with their flocks and herds. They had no abiding city: it was such a city that they sought. They had family customs regarding sex, the duty of blood revenge, the code of honour within the family but the permission to practise deceit when dealing with strangers. We will consider the customs regarding sex. The Patriarchs regarded woman as man's inferior and as man's property. The husband owned his wife, and the father owned his daughter. These property rights were carefully safeguarded by custom. If a man's daughter was a virgin she had her marriageable price. The right to sell his daughter in marriage was sure to react on the preservation of the girl's honour. Any violation of this honour was punished severely. The marriage dowry and the honour of the daughter explain each other. We do not agree that it was the marriage price which originated the moral idea. There was no moral idea such as we have on marriage, but a certain code of sexual honour did regulate the transaction from the side of the father and the prospective husband. The virgin was a

higher type of woman to the man seeking marriage : at any rate she was more desirable and more costly property to acquire if she were a virgin. Married men were permitted to possess concubines and slaves; but to commit adultery with a married woman was a violation of the property rights of the husband, and was accordingly punishable.

These customs regulating sex-relations were outgrown in the Old Testament itself, while the difference between woman as the property of man and woman as a personality with eternal values for God, as Jesus taught she was, measures the difference between the patriarchal home and the Christian home. The Christian ideal of marriage rests on the intrinsic value of human personality, and it is the revelation of God by Jesus which has established such value, whether of man or woman. It is absurd on this account to decry the patriarchal values of woman. It is better to learn that the test of Divine revelation is the increasing moral values attached to all human relationships.

If the Patriarchs had understood the value of the human soul as taught by Jesus, they would have acted differently. In one narrative we see that Abraham was led to value human life as God valued it. We read that "Abraham was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran." What were his ideas and habits before this conversion, or before this new departure in his life? For one thing he had believed in child sacrifice: he had believed that the gods demanded it: he had seen his fathers offer it: he had seen others offer it,

and when he was converted at seventy-five he thought he still ought to offer it, and that God required him to do so. And what happened? Why, God made it clear to Abraham that He was entirely different from other gods in this respect. He revealed to Abraham that He was the source of human life, and that He set upon it an entirely different value. The custom of sacrificing children in the flame was to be no part of Abraham's worship, and the miraculous thing is this—the custom of child sacrifice was discontinued in the official worship of Israel, with one or two exceptions. Here is a man of seventy-five whose conversion brings new light on the value of human life. He breaks with a custom which every one around him was still practising. His ideas are changed; his habits are changed; his worship is changed. The God of all truth was teaching Abraham.

We shall never do justice to Abraham until we know as much as possible about the Babylonian background of his history, the times in which he lived, and how he had been taught to think. We shall never understand what divine revelation means in relation to Abraham until we see exactly what progress Abraham made; how he was induced to make a new start and how he responded to God by faith. And how can we explain this astounding transformation and this growing nobility of character in a man of seventy-five except by saying that it was due to the grace of God? Thus we come to understand that the revelation of God means that men are learning; that men have new ideas; that

they break with old customs and begin to live for the future rather than on the past.

II. THE NATIONAL RELIGION OF ISRAEL.

The period between the Exodus and the prophets of the eighth century before Christ, or between Moses and Isaiah, is often most perplexing to those who have never thought of explaining the Old Testament by the historical method. The period extended to upwards of five hundred years. There is no doubt that Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, and that at Sinai they became deeply conscious of themselves as a nation with a destiny. From this time onward God was to be known by the name of Jahweh. "And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am Jahweh, and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob as God Almighty, but by My name Jahweh I was not known to them." (Exodus vi. 2, 3.) Jahweh is said to be "the God of your fathers." From this time He is definitely known as the national God of Israel. The word Jahweh means "I am that I am," or "I will be that I will be." It means that Jahweh is eternal and consistent, ever abiding and ever achieving because the ever inexhaustible.

While Israel held tenaciously to the belief that Jahweh was her God, it was also recognised that other nations had their gods. Chemosh was the God of the Moabites: Milcom was the God of the Ammonites; and these gods were regarded as real

and existing. Israel believed that Jahweh was superior to Chemosh, and Milcom and other national gods, just as they believed themselves superior to other peoples. It follows that when these nations were at war with each other the gods were also at war. Each god fought for his own land and his own people. Whenever Israel was involved in war Jahweh was also involved. "The Lord your God, He it is who fighteth for you." (Joshua xxiii. 10). When the heart of Israel melts at the coming battle with the Amorites, the people are reassured with the words: "The Lord your God who goeth before you, He shall fight for you." (Deut. i. 30). God led the people in battle. The intensity of Jahweh's war effort for Israel is measured from the Song of Deborah in Judges v. "The Lord came down for me against the mighty": "Curse ye Meroz, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they came not to the help of Jahweh against the mighty." All acts of war were ascribed to God, whether the slaughter of the enemy, or famine, or pestilence. Israel was so convinced of the leadership of Jahweh in battle that the story of the nation's warfare was recorded in the Book of the Wars of Jahweh. This book has been lost, although we have extracts from it in the literature of the national religious period. (Numbers xxi. 14.)

We will notice the command to exterminate the Amalekites, which has occasioned deep searchings of heart among Christian people. "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, I have marked that which Amalek

did to Israel, how he set himself in the way when he came up out of Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have and spare them not, but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." (1 Sam. xv. 23.)

Samuel sent Saul on this errand, and Saul executed the command, except that he spared Agag the King and the best of the cattle. For this conduct Samuel dismissed Saul from the Kingship of Israel and slew Agag with his own hands, "before the Lord."

Now this was national religion. In a world where fighting was the recognised method of ensuring national existence and supremacy, it is not surprising that gods and people fought to exterminate each other. Samuel's views of God were immature, but they were the views of the age in which he lived. The miracle of Israel's history is that such views were outgrown. Even in Samuel himself there were nobler qualities of life than his jealousy of Saul or his loyalty to the idea of the extermination of his enemies.

It will throw light on the idea of God during the period of National Religion in the Old Testament if we consider how the individual and the nation were related in their responsibility to God. Jahweh was the God of Israel and the nation was held responsible to Him.

During the period of national religion it is always most important to preserve the unity of the nation; to ensure that every individual shall act in the

interests of the nation; any one failing to do so, or acting for his own ends, is guilty of sin and worthy of death. At this stage of development the nation is the social unit. No value attaches to the individual except as a member of the nation; the individual has no rights of his own, and in so far as he asserts any personal rights he is punished. The supreme concern is to maintain the solidarity of the nation. What conserves national unity is right; what leads to the disintegration of that unity is wrong. Thus it came about that in Israel individualism was the sin of sins, and for such an offence there was no forgiveness. National Religion was socialism working out its most exacting demands on every Israelite.

The narrative of Achan in Joshua vii. will illustrate the sin of individualism, and the character of nationalism. Israel was defeated in battle, and Joshua could not understand it. When he enquired, Jahweh explained that Israel had sinned: "They have even transgressed my covenant, they have taken the devoted thing." The devoted thing was part of the property of the enemy which ought to have been destroyed. It was a wedge of gold and a Babylonish garment. And Jahweh said, "I will not be with you any more until ye take away the devoted thing from among you." By the method of elimination Achan was discovered as the culprit. He had been guilty of a glaring act of individualism, for he had sought to enrich himself on an occasion when the interests of the nation were at stake. Achan existed for the sake of the

nation, and his default was the cause of the nation's defeat. In the end Achan confessed his sin, and we should conclude that his own punishment would be adequate. Not so. National religion held the whole of Achan's family as involved in the father's transgression. This explains why Achan and his sons and daughters and his asses and sheep and all that he had were taken: "And they stoned them with stones and they burned them with fire."

It was the custom, then, of this period of religious life to hold a family responsible for what the head of the family did. "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me." "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." Jahweh was the national God who was thought to hold the children responsible for the sins of their parents: that was His attitude to any act of individualism which was selfish and likely to imperil the efficiency and the progress of the nation. We must also finish the quotation to show Jahweh's attitude to those who loved Him and served Him; "and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments." It was the consciousness of Jahweh's love for Israel which deepened and sweetened Israel's life and finally led to an entirely new idea of His character and His motive toward the children of such parents as Achan.

Another startling illustration of this communal

responsibility is that concerning the demands of the Gibeonites on the family of Saul. This demand came from a people who did not worship Jahweh, but David conceded their demand. It may be that David instigated the affair. The story is told in 2 Samuel xxi. During the Kingship of David there was a famine extending over three years. When David sought an explanation of the famine whether by prayer or through the priest the answer was : "And the Lord said, it is for Saul and his bloody house, because he put to death the Gibeonites." It seems that Saul had well-nigh exterminated this nation. When David consulted the Gibeonites concerning atonement for Saul's deed, they replied that it was not a matter which money could settle. Neither silver nor gold could wipe out Saul's action. So they said, "The man that consumed us and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the borders of Israel, let seven men of his sons be delivered to us, and we will hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul." David acceded to this request, sparing Mephibosheth, who was lame. Saul's seven descendants were hanged in the mountain before Jahweh : "They were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, at the beginning of the barley harvest." In this way atonement was made for Saul's sin. The children were punished for the father's transgression.

Less than four hundred years afterwards, these views of family solidarity began to change. The conception of Jahweh as the God of all nations and

the Saviour of every human soul led to the view that each soul was responsible to Him. Jeremiah grasped this truth as God revealed it to his reverent mind. No individual was to be held responsible for the wrongs done by another. "In those days they shall say no more, the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grapes his teeth shall be set on edge." (Jeremiah xxxi. 29, 30). Ezekiel preaches a remarkable sermon on this new truth. He received his message from God. *"The word of the Lord came unto me again, saying, what mean ye that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth it shall die."* (xviii. 1-4.) Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel were wrestling with the ancient ideas of moral responsibility such as are illustrated in the narratives of Achan and the hanging of Saul's sons. They both affirm that God demands the cessation of punishing children for the sins of the parents. But in Joshua vii. Jahweh is said to demand that "He that is taken with the devoted thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the Lord and because he hath wrought folly in Israel."

Here are two views of moral responsibility. The

Old Testament claims that Jahweh is the authority for both the views. Between David and Jeremiah there is a period of nearly four hundred years. During this time God was enlightening reverent and humble minds, revealing Himself to pure hearts such as Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. Later, Jeremiah has an entirely new idea of God compared with Joshua or David. And it was Jeremiah's new idea of God which led to the new idea of the human soul as responsible for its own sin.

We have selected points for discussion in this chapter which bring out the character of national religion in relation to Jahweh as the national God. And if the consciousness of personal responsibility was not that taught by Jesus, there is abundant evidence within the nation of a deepening religious experience. Israel always had noble sons as leaders. Moses remains the greatest law-giver of the ages. It is true that the Ten Commandments were negative, but they covered the experience of those days, and they were always being expanded to meet new circumstances. They state what is due to God : He must be worshipped ; His supremacy over other gods must be recognised ; His days must be kept as holy and His name revered. The Commandments also affirm what is due to fellow-Israelites : a man's life is sacred ; his wife, his chattels, his cattle are protected ; men must neither steal nor practise deceit and children must honour parents.

Jahweh was jealous for His honour, and He fought for the soul of Israel as well as against her enemies. He has moral features such as righteous-

ness and mercy. He cared for Israel's moral welfare. Other gods, such as the gods of Canaan, did nothing of the kind. The Baals had no interest whatever in the moral conduct of their worshippers. This difference is vital, and explains those spiritual and ethical qualities in Israel by which revealed religion was able to live until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That the uncritical reader may not be unduly distressed at some aspects of this brief review of the national religion of the Old Testament, we will refer to the survival of national religion in the twentieth century.

III. NATIONAL RELIGION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

There was a remarkable revival of nationalism during the war, and it has not yet abated. The best international minds of the day, some of whom are working through the League of Nations and seeking to lead the world along the road of goodwill and disarmament, are most conscious of the strength of modern nationalism. The nationalism of the Russian people has expressed itself in Bolshevism; the nationalist movement in Italy has taken a different form, that of Fascism; the nationalism of France is still a peril to Europe. These nationalist movements are all expressions of the mind which leads a people to exalt their own country at the expense of other countries. We do not criticise a sane and spiritually-minded national-

ism. We are born Italians or French or British or of some other nation. A Christian nationalism would mean that each nation contributed to the peace and welfare of other nations; it would be based on the conviction that every human soul is precious to God and ought to be valued as such. Which is only another way of saying that the League of Nations is based on the New Testament idea of God: the idea being that God hath made of one blood all the nations of the world and that they ought to live together as God's children.

Centuries have passed since the days of Hebrew nationalism, and we are still conscious of the perils of nationalism, which can only end in another war unless the powers of righteousness and peace prevail. Nationalism of the kind we see promotes hatred, suspicion, and hatches the brood of industrial vipers which batten on war.

When such nationalism is allied to religion it is only more fanatical and uncontrollable. In religious fury the Japanese hurled themselves at the guns of Port Arthur crying "Banzai." The Moslem works himself up into fanaticism by repeating "Allah." German nationalism was expressed by the Kaiser as he demanded a place for Germany in the sun, or claimed that he was the All Highest, appointed by God to extend Teutonic civilization to the ends of the earth. When this nationalism is supported by a State Church we always witness the sad degeneration of religious life. There are people in Britain whose God is thoroughly British, and who regard the Empire as the pet of

the Deity. Things were done in 1914-18, and done in the name of God, which were as barbarous and vicious as any events recorded in the period of the National Religion of Israel. We have lived through a period when religion to many was nothing but patriotism. The national Churches, which still bless guns and warships and regimental colours, too often feed the flame of nationalism.

Since so-called Christian nations in the twentieth century have erred thus grievously, we may see the nationalism of the Old Testament in a truer light. Our Lord said that the men of Sodom and Gomorrah would rise up in judgment against the men of His generation and would condemn them. We might add that the Hebrews will rise up in judgment against modern nations and condemn them. Modern nations have had the teaching and example of Christ and ought to have advanced far beyond the possibility of war. We do not attribute to God the evils of national religion in the twentieth century. We attribute evil to the stupidity and arrogance of man. Nor must we attribute to God what we may call the inhumanity of national religion a thousand years before Christ. Such a religious stage was outgrown in the Old Testament itself. Through great personalities God was leading Israel slowly into new light and truth concerning Himself.

CHAPTER V.

THE IDEA OF GOD AND WORLD PEACE.

THE prophets who lived in the eighth century B.C. (Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah) revealed a new idea of God which was destined to revolutionise the whole spiritual outlook of Israel. Each of the four prophets named had an intimate personal experience of God's grace and forgiveness. Without the intervention of priest or the mediation of sacrifices, Isaiah and Hosea had first hand experiences of God, in which they learned new truth concerning Him. God revealed Himself to them not only as the God of the Hebrews, but as the God of the whole earth, and of the whole race. Every human being was related to Him and it followed that all the nations were related to each other as His children. This truth had the most far reaching effect on the preaching of the prophets. God's relation with Israel was no longer stated in military language: the conception of God as fighting for Israel against other nations now fades out of view. It is true that Isaiah declares Jerusalem to be inviolable, and foretells that God will defend the city for His own sake and for the sake of His servant David; but such a deliverance from the Assyrian hosts is not undertaken in the interests of Israel's military or political

ascendancy. It is an act of deliverance which reveals the righteous character of God, and which character Israel would do well to trust. The destiny of the nation does not lie in military conquests, but in loyalty to the Messiah, who is now the Prince of Peace. War and violence are no longer regarded as any part of the Messianic purpose. The future of Israel is bound up with the holy and peaceful purpose of God.

This truth is made clear in one of Isaiah's earliest utterances. He has proclaimed the new doctrine of God as the ruler of the whole race, and he believes that all nations will find Him through the missionary work of Israel. The Lord's house shall be exalted at the head of the mountains and all nations shall flow into it. And when the nations understand the truth about God and learn that they are God's children, the first thing they will do will be to beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and learn war no more. This is the truth which came to Isaiah in 740 B.C. He is the first man in history with the true international mind. Isaiah sees that nations will one day disarm, and He says they will do it when they understand the truth about God. The prophet saw that there was one way of abolishing war, and that was when the nations had learned to walk in the light of the Lord and composed their national differences in that light. Isaiah means that when men really know the truth about God they will live together as His children; and in that day violence and government by brute force shall cease.

The Messianic utterances of Isaiah emphasise this new idea of God as the Ruler of the Universe, whose purpose is peace and redemption. He will be exalted in judgment, and wrong-doers are warned against trifling with His righteousness. The glory of war, however, has departed. The armour of the armed man and the muddy and bloodstained garments of the warrior are for burning. They are fuel for the fire. In the future the government of Israel and of the world shall rest on the shoulder of the Child who is born and the Son who is given, whose name is the Prince of Peace. And if men scorn this new view of the destiny of Israel or doubt the increasing victory and government of peace in the world, let them know that the zeal of the Lord shall perform this.

This confidence of Isaiah in the righteous purpose of God as comprehending the destiny of the whole race is seen in his attitude to the world-powers of his day.

Belgium has been called the cock-pit of Europe. She is a buffer State between two nations always restless and threatening ruin. The greatest battles in Europe have been fought on the soil of Belgium. Judah was also a buffer State between Assyria on the North East and Egypt on the South West. Like all buffer States she was tempted to play off one world-power against another. Isaiah was often in conflict with the Egyptian party in Judah. He saw that his people had everything to lose and nothing to gain by playing off Egypt against Assyria. On the other hand the prophet foretells

a day when Israel shall be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, for that the Lord of hosts hath blessed them, saying; "Blessed be Egypt My people and Assyria the work of My hands and Israel Mine inheritance." It is a dream of race reconciliation for which we still yearn, and for which men will continue to yearn until they have the law of God in their hearts and live as His children. Isaiah makes it clear that men will never understand how they ought to live until they know the truth about God. Crude ideas of God mean war in commerce and between nations. True ideas of God mean peace and goodwill among men.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FREEDOM OF GOD.

THE divisions of Christendom are often said to be lamentable, and we agree that they are. We also agree in commending the motive of good men who seek to overcome these divisions. It seems, however, that the attempt to unite Christian men often minimises the differences between them. To say that Christian people agree on fundamentals and differ on incidentals is to misunderstand the real issue. For the obvious conclusion is that Christian people do not agree on the most fundamental doctrine of all: that is, they do not agree concerning the doctrine of God. The Baptist is a convinced separatist still, because he cannot reconcile his belief in God or his conviction regarding the character of God, with the views held by many other Christians.

It is always baffling to the unthinking man, that Christian people have so many conflicting theories of Christianity when the fact of Christianity is set out so clearly in the New Testament. It may be answered that there is development of doctrines in the New Testament itself, but we can say without any hesitation that the New Testament religion is the unfolding and enlarging of the experience that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. The types of Christian experience in

the New Testament reveal the fulness of Christ. There are discussions on what Gentile Christians shall do and not do, and Paul was attacked because he was not duly authorised or ordained as one of the twelve; but Paul won the battle for the New Testament Church against the tendency of Jewish legalism. Paul was a Baptist, a man who believed first and was baptised afterwards, who strongly resisted, especially in his Epistle to the Galatians, all attempts to bind the Church as men have bound her in later times; and he affirmed what every Baptist affirms, that men are saved by faith and that the Church is the community of such redeemed men.

Now Baptists claim that New Testament Christianity is normative; it is the standard type of Christianity; and all development of Christian experience and organisation must be true to, or must not deny, the New Testament standard of doctrine and life. Modern Christianity has broken so far loose from the normative Christianity of the New Testament that what we have at the present time is nothing less than different Christianities. How many different Christianities there are we are not concerned to suggest; but we might as well face the facts that there are different and conflicting Christianities in the modern world. Professor Leuba has gathered forty-eight definitions of religion by different writers: there are many more than forty-eight divisions in Christendom, and each division rests on a different definition of what Christianity is. We go so far as to say that our

different definitions of Christianity are due to the fact that we do not believe in the same God. Our differences are really as deep and as serious as that. In drawing out the meaning of this statement we will seek to make clear what Baptists believe about God and how their conceptions of personal religion, of the Church, of the Ministry and of the State are the working out of this doctrine of God in life and history.

It is often affirmed that Baptists have stood for personal freedom, freedom of conscience, freedom of speech and the press, freedom to worship according to the light given by the Holy Spirit and the freedom of the Church from State-control. This affirmation is true, but it may not be well stated in such terms, and it has often led to a grave misunderstanding of the Baptist position. It has been charged against Baptists that they stress individual freedom at the expense of the religious community, or that they have an inadequate doctrine of the Church, the Ministry, and the Sacraments. It has also been said that their demand for freedom has led them to emphasise the ethical and political ideals of Christian life at the expense of the aesthetic and contemplative ideals. These criticisms rest on a misconception, for Baptists have been standing through history, not primarily for the freedom of man, but for the freedom of God. Books and articles without number have been written by the Baptists of the world in the interests of the freedom of the Church and the State, but the fundamental demand of the Baptist consciousness is for the

recognition of the freedom of God. The emphasis on personal religion or the claim that there is no substitute for a first-hand experience of God: the conception of the Christian ministry, of Church life and organisation, of the ethical interpretation of the Gospel in relation to society or industry or the State, can only be understood in the light of the Baptist conviction that God is free.

We make no demands for the freedom of the human soul except that God Himself is free. We make no claim for the freedom of the Church except that He who loved the Church and bought her with His own blood is also free. We have never fought for political freedom on any other ground than our belief in God. It is necessary to state the matter in this way because the early Baptist separatists were grievously misunderstood. These men in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were not beating the air, nor were they prepared to suffer for the sake of abstract ideas. They cannot be dismissed as men whose religion was no more than a protest or a dissent. It was a protest, but it was a protest which grew out of the greatest affirmation which faith ever makes. It is still the habit of the *Church Times* and of Anglo-Catholics to assume that Romanism or Anglo-Catholicism is the Grand Positive against which Free Churchmen simply exist to protest. We are still thought to be men who dissent, and who embody the spirit which denies, and it is said that we are trying to live on unsatisfying negatives. To begin with, it is a staggering assumption that either

Romanism or Anglo-Catholicism is the Grand Positive. It is an assumption which would have been ridiculed out of court long since in any other science than theology. It is a false assumption, false both to the New Testament and to history. And what is false to science and history cannot be true in theology.

The truth is, that you cannot reconcile the Roman and the Anglo-Catholic doctrine of God with that of the Baptist. It follows, therefore, that you cannot reconcile the Roman and Anglo-Catholic doctrines of the Church and the Ministry with those of the Baptist; it follows further that the educational, ethical and political ideals of the Romanists and the Baptists will inevitably clash. Baptists and Anglo-Catholics do not believe in the same God. In religious life everything turns on the doctrine of God: it always did and it always does.

The Romanist idea of God lies at the back of the papal system, of Jesuit morality and the massacre of St. Bartholomew's day: it explains the claims of papal infallibility, the methods of the Inquisition, the burning of heretics, and the impotence of Latin civilisation. It was true spiritual insight which led the C.O.P.E.C. conference to commence all its discussions on the basis of the doctrine of God. At the end of C.O.P.E.C.'s Report on that doctrine Father Day inserted a note of reservation that he could not accept several statements about God as orthodox. In the end Father Day and his fellow Romanists withdrew from C.O.P.E.C. Again, Rome refuses to join with all other Churches in

order to further International Friendship and abolish war. It is impossible to ignore the significance of what Rome believes about God in relation to these matters and her part in history.

Every country where Romanism has had complete religious sway during the last three hundred years has either suffered through terrible revolution or is to-day tottering to its foundations. France liberated herself by revolution. Italy and Spain are in the throes of revolution. The same principle is operating in Russia: it is impossible to divorce the condition of Russia to-day from the religion which was taught by the Orthodox Church. The kind of Christianity which is taught and practised in a land makes all the difference to the moral values of life. The type of civilisation and of culture in every land has vital relation to the doctrine of God taught by the Church to the people.

Romanists do not believe in a God who is free. Thus it is explained that Rome has liberated no forces making for social advance and ethical progress. In France political reform and social progress were prompted by atheists, who hated Rome and all her works. This failure to liberate the souls of men and the life of nations is rooted in a determinist conception of God. Romanism is Grand Determinism. She denies that God is free to approach man except through her own elaborate regulations. The whole papal system has been evolved in the interests of protecting men against the anger of God. This statement could not be illustrated better than by drawing attention to the

picture of the Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel at Rome. This is the private Chapel of the Popes and was decorated by the greatest artists of the times. There are Biblical scenes on the walls, and on the roof of the Chapel an artistic representation of the creation of the world. There is, however, one picture which was painted to express the ecclesiastical theory which we have named Determinism. Every worshipper who lifts his eyes to adore the consecrated host is confronted by the picture of the Last Judgment. Behind the priest, behind the altar, behind the lighted candles, behind the sacred drama of worship, the Last Judgment is always there. The only protection for the worshipper from hell fire is the priest and the altar. The Roman priest does not beat about the bush. He says there is only one door to heaven and that he has the keys of the door. The Roman doctrine of God is such that the whole papal system has been evolved to protect men from His wrath. God is not free to act or approach the human soul except through this machine. Rome denies that men have been saved or can be saved except through her own ecclesiastical system. Outside the Church there is no salvation. How can this organisation be reconciled with the normative Christianity of the New Testament? How did it grow? The Baptist strikes at the root of the error and affirms that this ecclesiastical determinism cannot be developed from the doctrine of God as taught by Christ. And while we deny that this doctrine of God has any basis in the New Testament, we also

claim that it cannot be maintained in the face of history and of modern science.

Bishop Gore is so often regarded as the spokesman of the High Church party in England that we will examine briefly his doctrine of God in relation to the Anglo-Catholic doctrine of the Church. Dr. Gore wrote a book in 1921 on *Belief in God*, which has been followed by later works on *Belief in Christ* and *Belief in the Church*. In these books the Bishop has sought to reconstruct the Christian Faith in the light of modern knowledge. It is clear that there are two irreconcilable positions in these books. Dr. Gore says that the doctrine of God is fundamental, and reasons in his first book for a belief in God who is free. He affirms that Nature is not a closed system, and insists that the Christian conception of God involves the possibility of miracle, which he defines as an extraordinary action of God. The Bishop makes this claim for God in relation to Nature, and whatever scientists and philosophers may say in regard to such a claim, the Christian consciousness will agree that God is Free in His own universe, and within the moral scope of His character and motive. Only thus does the informed Christian mind to-day account for the new emergents or new beginnings such as life and mind, and the moral consciousness. But when Dr. Gore deals with the divine approach to man he falls into the error in the spiritual realm which he had attacked in the physical realm. He says that Nature is not a closed system, but his reasoning is to the effect that the Church is a closed system. When

dealing with Nature he demands a God who is free; when dealing with the Church he believes in God who is determined by the limits of the Catholic system. In the spiritual realm the Bishop does not allow for miracle—that special or extraordinary action on the part of God which could bring into existence a redeemed society outside the limits of what he knows as the Catholic Church. The Bishop has long regarded the Episcopate as the *necessary mark of the Church*, holding exactly the same position of Catholic authority as the Creeds or the Canon of Scripture. This extraordinary claim should be considered carefully; that the bishop as known in Anglicanism is necessary to the existence of the Church. We answer that the Episcopate as we know it in modern times did not exist in the New Testament Church, and is not essential to the existence of the Church to-day. There is no sound spiritual or historical ground for such an astounding theory as put forth by Bishop Gore. He claims to trace the Sacraments and the Catholic Orders back to Christ Himself, affirming that these are the marks of the true Church, and that the approach of God to man is regulated through these means of grace. If this claim could be justified it would be nothing less than an ecclesiastical system sealed and closed and exclusive. The claim, however, is without an adequate theological foundation. It rests on a determinist view of God: it sets a limit to divine action. It is said that divine grace through this system is “regular,” and it has been explained that ministries and sacraments outside this system

are "irregular." The answer is that such adjectives have no meaning in relation to sin and grace. When God approaches the soul we have the divine initiative which changes men and constitutes such changed men into His Church, the society of the redeemed.

There are two things to be said in answer to Bishop Gore's reconstruction of the Christian Faith. Firstly, it does not rest on the New Testament. Secondly, it ignores the facts of Christian experience, especially during the last three hundred years. Episcopacy was adopted as an attempt to secure the unity of the Church in the second and third centuries, though no one would say that the bishop in the second and third century had anything in common with the modern bishop and his modern diocese. The bishop in the second century was the bishop of a single church: if every Baptist minister were called a bishop it would be much nearer to the practice of the second century than is the system of modern episcopacy. The bishop in the second century was elected by his own congregation, and he was sometimes deposed by his own congregation. The bishop in the second century was elected exactly as the Baptist Minister is elected to-day. Slowly the more aggressive and influential bishops of the second and third centuries acquired the leadership of their less gifted brethren, and we witness a growing and exclusive claim on the part of the bishops to rule the Church. There were protests even in those days against the growing power of the bishops. Tertullian and the

Montanists revolted against this newly-constituted authority in the Church, and saw clearly whither it would lead. In the third century, when Episcopacy set up the claims which are now upheld by Anglo-Catholics, the unity of the Church was threatened. And it was often threatened by the disgraceful struggles of men who were prepared to resort to indescribable tricks in order to gain the place of bishop, an office for which men scrambled as for secular power and privilege. In 366 A.D. there was a dispute between two men, Damasus and Ursinus, for the Roman Bishopric. At the election the followers of these two men fought so bitterly that 137 were left dead on the floor of the church. One writer comments on the event as follows: "The successful candidate is sure of being enriched by the offerings of nations; of riding about in carriages through the streets of Rome as soon as his dress is composed with becoming care and elegance; and of giving banquets so profuse and elegant that their entertainments shall surpass the sumptuousness of the imperial tables." Praetextatus said to Damasus, who was elected, "Make me Bishop of Rome, and I will forthwith become a Christian."

History is decisive that there is no special and necessary virtue in Episcopacy as such. It was an attempt to hold the Church together, whereas it led, and has often led, to the disruption of the Church, and in England it was and still is one of the main causes of separation.

Episcopacy drove the Separatists to America,

where to-day there are eleven million Baptist Church members and several million more worshippers in Baptist Churches. Instead of proving a bond of unity, Episcopacy has been a veritable bone of contention. Could facts be more conclusive against Bishop Gore's argument that Episcopacy is as necessary to the Church as Scripture itself? The majority of Christian people in the world to-day refuse to acknowledge Episcopacy as an exclusive system for regulating the grace of God to men. History proves that Episcopacy has broken down, and broken down badly. Yet these Christians who reject Episcopacy do nourish their spiritual life on the word of God recorded in the Scriptures.

We acknowledge Dr. Gore's references to the work of the Spirit of God among Free Churchmen, but he consistently refuses (as does the *Church Times*) to grant full-orbed Christian experience to Christian ministers and people who exclude themselves from the so-called Catholic system.

We have discussed these systems, which claim to determine the approach of God to men that we might contrast them with the Baptist belief that God is free. Baptists do not believe that the Ministry or the Church or the Sacraments are a closed system essential to regulate the approach of God to men. God is free to take the initiative when and where and how He will. He is always taking the initiative, and when He finds faith in men His grace is always effective. God does not work through any system as such, whereas He always

works through the preacher who has faith, and through the Church which believes, and through the penitent who trusts His word. Apart from faith the minister is ineffective, the Church is dead, and the sinner is unsaved. Without faith neither the minister nor the Church can please God. In the New Testament sense there is no Church apart from those who have personal faith in God through Christ. This explains why Baptists believe in conversion and regard it as due to the direct action of the Spirit of God on the spirit of man; it also explains why Baptists believe that a few redeemed people may organise themselves into a local Church. They need no recognition nor oversight from any one to declare or constitute them a Church. They are a Church because they are people who through faith have received the grace of God into their hearts and are met together to worship God and extend His Kingdom. And such small communities have the whole argument of the New Testament on their side, and most of all the words of our Lord, "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I." The Baptist doctrine of the Church rests on the doctrine that God is free: that Christ is free, and that His Presence and His Presence alone constitutes the redeemed society which we name the Church.

Again, Baptists believe that God is free to choose His own ministers, and that the ministries through which the race has been most richly blessed have been God's free choice. Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Paul were God's own choice. These men

considered life in the terms of God's personal call to them. The Anglo-Catholics cannot explain the call and the ministry of Paul on their theory of the ministry. Further, we cannot make terms with a theory which assumes that the system of divine grace works where there are serious ethical disqualifications, or lack of personal faith in the minister. Neither social position nor wealth nor education would induce us to admit men into Baptist colleges or the Baptist ministry. The Baptist ministry is the most exacting and wearing work because it knows no official status and because it rests on the direct call of God.

It is sometimes said that the Baptist puts too much personal responsibility on the minister—more than human nature ought to be asked to bear. There is the minister's personal responsibility for divine worship; he must pray from his heart and interpret the word of God to the people. He must do his own thinking and test it in the presence of God before he expresses it in public. His preaching, his thinking, his personal preparation for the preaching of the word of God which is to convince men of sin and build up the Church in the faith of Christ, are never finished. His pastoral work is so responsible that he can never say that he has completely fulfilled it. The personal responsibility which is laid on the Baptist minister for public worship and the cure of souls is appalling, because it is personal responsibility to God Himself. Apart from this consciousness of obligation to God the burden would be intolerable. We do not know

many men who would or could bear it. The Baptist ministry offers no security of tenure: when a minister's power has gone his work is over: he lives and his power endures as he daily answers the direct call of God. Apart from the grace of God this ministerial responsibility is more than human nature can bear. But we accept it, and we would have it so with all its crushing disappointments, because we are free as ministers of God. And in a day when there is a general shortage of men entering the ministry the Baptists of England have three applicants for every vacant place in their colleges.

It follows that the Baptist minister regards his responsibility as first to God and not to the Church. He distinguishes clearly between these two loyalties, and no Baptist minister ever identifies them. He knows that the Church may depart from the ways of God, and often has so departed: he insists that the Church was unfaithful in the seventeenth century when the Separatists left her. He knows that the Christian Church has failed and decayed, when magical and pagan practices have been introduced into her; that when the Church has strayed from the Gospels she has lost her power; and that revival and reformation have always followed the return of the Church to the Christ of the Gospels. The Baptist expects the Church to live and act according to the ethical standard of Christ, and he seeks to preserve the purity of the Church by the daily renewal of consecration to God. Should the Church depart from the ethical ideal of Christ the

Baptist minister must first discharge his personal obligation to God. He will challenge the Church. Thomas Hill Green says that progress is due to conscientious men: progress always has come about through the rise of great personalities, who have placed loyalty to God before their loyalty to the Church.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FREEDOM OF MAN.

THE doctrine of the Freedom of God has developed a sturdy independence of character in the members of the Baptist Church. Face to face with God in Christ, the Baptist has been continually prompted to do his own thinking and has developed convictions such as are rooted in a first-hand spiritual experience. The immediate consciousness of God has not driven him into an individual isolation such as the ascetics sought in the desert, when they fled from the Church and the world. Nor has it led him to develop a mysticism which has spent itself in lazy contemplation or sickly aestheticism. The intensity of personal religion among the Baptists has inspired the best social and political movements in England during the last three hundred years: it has made the Baptist a pioneer who has applied the theocratic principle to all spheres of life. In every real spiritual experience there is that which a man must do for himself, no one else can do it for him, and in doing it his intellectual capacities are released, and his sense of responsibility to God and his fellow men is deepened. Being convinced that God intends every personality to develop to the utmost, the Baptist has laboured to give spiritual, social, educational and political opportunities for such human growth.

This would be obvious to the reader if it were possible to consider in detail the moral impact which the Baptist Church has sought to make on the world. It could be shown how the moral passion of the Baptist has made him a pioneer in modern missionary enterprise, and how it has also led him to interpret the mind of Christ and apply the Christian ethical ideal to the State in all its activities; an attitude guided and inspired by the relation of the New Testament Church to the State and the world. We can only suggest the ends towards which this moral passion has been directed. Before doing so, it will be useful to review briefly the attitude of the New Testament Church to the State.

I.

The most important passage uttered by Jesus in relation to the State is, "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's." Jesus implied that Caesar was entitled to the tax which he demanded. He does not say that Caesar was elected by God nor that the Roman Empire was ruled in a way well-pleasing to God. We must remember that this particular text refers to taxation. If we desire to understand the attitude of Christ to the State we must do so in the light of His own universal principle of love. Jesus taught that all human relations should rest on love and He undoubtedly condemned any method or law in the State which violated His

principle of love. He refused to countenance physical violence in any form on the part of the individual or society. The use of physical force was "Gentile rule," and in the account of His temptations He definitely rejected the political methods of the earthly State as a means of realising His purpose. He went so far as to say that such political methods were Satanic and unable to advance His Kingdom.

It is always baffling to understand the existence of State-established Churches in the light of this attitude and teaching of our Lord. It is impossible to find a basis for State-Churches in the Gospels. What we do find is the refusal of Christ to use the methods of the State either to defend or to propagate His kingdom. The principles on which the State-Church rests and the methods used are in direct antagonism to the mind and work of Christ.

Then Jesus put loyalty to Himself before loyalty to the State. If the State demanded allegiance which was a denial of His lordship, then the Christian must be ready to suffer rather than submit: he must not meet violence by methods which were equally violent, but he must not deny his Lord. This was the principle of action in Christ's own case. He did His Father's will, and allowed the State and the Jewish Church to do their worst to Him on the cross.

When we turn to the Apostles we find that they never resist the State by force. At the same time, Peter and John carried out fearlessly the principle stated above when they refused to obey the

magistrates rather than deny God: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye."

Paul's attitude to the State was influenced by the protection which he found from Roman magistrates against the malicious action of the Jews. He draws out the full meaning of Christ that Caesar should be given what is due to him. "There is no authority except by God, and the powers that be are ordained by God." He says, "The magistrate is the minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil." On a mechanistic interpretation of the New Testament it is easily seen how the thirteenth chapter of Romans has furnished an argument for State-Churches. It is true that Paul sought protection against unscrupulous Jews when they dragged him into a Roman court; he claimed justice from the civil power on the ground of his Roman citizenship, but he never hinted that he would use the State to propagate the Gospel or to compel external loyalty to the Church. He advises Christians never to become plaintiffs in a pagan court of law.

The final word of the New Testament on the attitude of the Church to the State is found in the Johannine books. The Roman Emperor had brought about an entirely new situation so that the battle is now arrayed between the Church and the world. In the Book of Revelation there is war between the Lamb and the Beast, between Christ and the Emperor, the Church and the Empire. The State embodied in the Ruler was a drunken beast,

and drunk not with wine but with the blood of martyrs. Still, there is no revolution and no attack by the Church on the State. Rather than deny their Lord, however, the saints washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Here we have unrelenting violence on the part of the State and martyrdom rather than submission on the part of Christian disciples. The saints were fastened in bags of tar and lit in Nero's gardens, while others were tied in bags of reptiles to amuse the mobs. Domitian claimed worship from the Christians, and we read that the followers of the Lamb refused to worship the Beast. At the turning of the first and second centuries it was obvious that the Church could make no terms with the State.

This brief review of the New Testament life and teaching will help us to see how impossible it is to reconcile State-Churches with the Christianity of the first century in our era. In the New Testament the Church lives and is exhorted to live by the power of her own spiritual resources, and she expands by the inherent triumph of her own spiritual methods. The Church herself is built of men whose faith is in God and her task is to work towards an ideal society which shall be built on the universal principle of love and good-will. The Church is appointed to convert the world until the world's use of physical force has given place to universal brotherhood. The Church in the New Testament is concerned neither with monarchies nor aristocracies, nor republics, but with theocracy: that is, with the establishment of the Kingdom of

God. The Church to-day then ought to be free from all political alliance and entanglement. And believing in the freedom of God, Baptists have always believed that the Church should be free to do her work unfettered by the State.

II.

For upwards of 300 years Baptists have been working out their doctrines of the freedom of God and the Church. They were found in Cromwell's army, and made their contribution to the first democratic struggle in England which was for religious liberty. It is necessary to stress the spiritual nature of this struggle, for there are too many historians who write of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries and miss the wood for the trees. They minimise or ignore the contribution of Free Churchmen to English life: and they do not see that until the fight had been won for spiritual freedom England was in bondage and would have remained in bondage. Men whose life was ordered upon the principle of the Freedom of God were not likely to tolerate either the divine rights of kings or of bishops. They broke the power of both. Thus the first revolution in England was religious, and led to the abolition of the vested interests of the priestly caste. The State-Church had persecuted the Baptists and others, and had driven them into exile, but they returned to the battle for religious freedom, and at length broke the power of the priest and made it possible for the layman to enter into

his birthright in the Church of the Redeemer. This revolution established the democratic principle in religious life; it built the Church of Christ in England on the voluntary basis, and there came into existence the Free Churches.

Out of this conflict, and following upon it, there came the political revolution in England. The freedom which had been won for the Church was now demanded in relation to the affairs of the State. Baptists were now in the forefront of the struggle to establish the democratic principle in political life. They demanded a vote on the ground that they might discharge their personal responsibility to God for the good government of their country.

The value of this Free Church contribution to the political progress of England is rarely acknowledged and for many reasons it is studiously ignored. It is a fact, however, that Free Churchmen have been the apostles of political freedom. The village Free-Churchman became the village politician. At the close of the eighteenth century and through the nineteenth century there was not a measure passed for the social and political emancipation of England without the agitation and leadership of the Free Churches.

The French Revolution struck terror into the rulers of Britain in the early part of the nineteenth century. It is amusing to read how the French Revolution frightened people who sat in the seats of the mighty in this country. They were sure it would spread to England. And they had reason to

fear that it would. The State and the Church had kept the people poor and ignorant. Unless the Free Churches had provided an outlet for the democratic forces in England, it is most likely that the French Revolution would have spread to this country. What Voltaire had said about the Church in France could have been said about the Established Church in England in the eighteenth century. In France, however, it was the writing of the atheists which helped forward the terrors of the revolution.

In England, Free Churchmen had reason to resist the Church and the State just as bitterly as the atheists in France, but restrained by the conviction of personal responsibility to God, the political revolution came in England in the nineteenth century without bloodshed. Free Churchmen endured the rejection of the First Reform Bill without disorder. Macaulay's first speech for the passing of the Reform Bill indicated the temper of the people. "The danger is terrible," he says, "The time is short. If this bill should be rejected I pray to God that none of those who concur in rejecting it may ever remember their votes with unavailing remorse, amid the wreck of laws, the confusion of ranks, and the dissolution of the social order." The Reform Bill was passed in 1832, and was the first political triumph for democracy in England: and the battle was fought and won by men whose faith in political freedom was rooted in a first hand religious experience of God.

This passion for human freedom is further seen in relation to the anti-slavery agitation. Lord

Eldon, who was opposed to any change whatever, said that the slave trade could not be opposed to Christianity and the precepts of the Gospel, seeing that slavery was supported by the bishops.

As Sir G. Trevelyan says, "Without the aid of Nonconformist sympathy and money and oratory and organisation the Low Churchmen who supported the liberation of the slave would have been doomed to failure." "I know the Dissenters," said Lord John Russell, "they gave us the emancipation of the slave. They gave us the Reform Bill. They gave us Free Trade, and they will give us the abolition of Church rates." We might add that the moral passion of Free Churchmen gave England Temperance reform and the impetus which led the nation to become responsible for the education of its children. These are some of the political and ethical results towards which Baptists have generously and strenuously contributed. The conviction of the freedom of God has led the Baptist to burn with anger against all forms of injustice and tyranny which have fettered the soul or the body: it has kindled his moral passion and made him a reformer whose ideal is the Kingdom of God among men.



BT Townsend
101 Freedom of God
T74

892024

MAY 2 '30 *Beryl McKinnon*
MAY 13 '30 *825 Ayers Pl. Evanston*
JUN 24 '30 *A. L. Loring*
APR 16 '30 *825 W. 19th St. 7-8*
APR 27 1937 *See King*
3435 W. 19th St. Evanston

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



48 431 465

BT

892024

101

Townsend

T74

Freedom of God

MAY 2 '80

B. D. Thompson

MAY 13 '80

JUN 24 '80

R. L. Kuring

APR 26 '81

H. L. Kinggold

27 1980

BT 101

T 74

892024

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



48 431 465